

Dinner Whore Celibate

written by Andrea Lambert | August 29, 2016



I rise from my maudlin journal. Microwave frozen Trader Joe's Gnocchi alla Sorentina. Mouth the too hot tomato sauce from a white china bowl. Finish with a green tea mochi. The ice cream melts on my tongue cooling away the heat of the pasta.

My diet since I left my boyfriend is only frozen dinners, ice cream and coffee. I microwave alone at irregular hours. My plush grey cat watches from the floor.

There are way too many cockroaches for me to cook in this kitchen. I kill them with my bare hands. Brutally. A better Hollywood survival strategy than everything I learned from *Valley of the Dolls*. Crushing juicy roach bodies makes me feel like a conquering Daenerys Targaryn taking back my apartment from invaders.

Since the death of my wife I don't cook. I am too lazy. Busy writing. Complacent with bag after bag of frozen food. Filling. Nutritious. Enough. Gorgonzola Gnocchi. Sweet Potato Gnocchi. Butternut Squash Risotto. Mushroom Risotto. Spelt Risotto. Ravioli. Seafood Paella. Plastic bags of rations fill my freezer. One bag per day.

In post-breakup indulgence I eat a quart of coffee ice cream over a series of late nights. Eat chocolate-chip studded vanilla ice cream sandwiches as I labor over disclosive essays.

The Doctor said my 105 pound weight after getting sober and taking up yoga wasn't anorexia. I might have hyperthyroidism. I accept hyperthyroidism as I must accept my mental illness and herpes. Excuse to eat ice cream. Look anorexic but not be. Scary skinny might not be a good look for Fall but it's mine this year. Along with batshit crazy disease whore.

I accept what is. I must. Stress comes from resisting what is.

I am content to be forever alone after that emotionally abusive failed marriage track relationship. After the catastrophic failure of my first and only marriage.

I was engaged twice to abusive addicts who lived in my apartments. I wanted to get married so badly that I was willing to supply the rings. Support the men. I wised up eventually. Broke off both engagements. I'm never doing that again.

At 34 I married a CalArts MFA gold star lesbian who made all my dreams come true. She committing suicide a year later. Left me to get sober. I reconstructed my life in Hollywood with our furniture and wedding gifts around me. Forever haunted by her ghost like a queer Miss Havisham on the literary margins.

I will never marry again. I will never cohabit again. I may never date again. I may never have sex again.

I take a year-long vow of celibacy in the car pumping my breakup playlist. Feel the wind in my long black hair with white roots. Flowing silver hair dominates my "Hair Goals" Pinterest. At forty my hair grows in white. I stop dyeing it. Resolve not to have sex or date again until the white grows out to my shoulders. I will have the striking Cruella DeVille hair I dream of.

By the time my white hair reaches my shoulders it may be too late to even get laid anymore. I am aware I only have so many pretty years left. As everyone does. In my Schizoaffective promiscuity I have already had all the sex anyone needs to have in nine lifetimes. I feel done.

I want Cruella DeVille's Disney single lady glam eccentricity without all the dalmatian kidnapping. Not that I don't own fur. I do. I just don't wear it out. It's way too hot in Los Angeles.

Not like I go to clubs where I could wear that rabbit fur jacket over a sequin tube top anymore anyway. As the disco diva nights of my youth fade to Liza Minelli seclusion. The days of the Frisco Disco are over. Consigned to the page and memory. I must protect my sobriety.

I stay out of bars and clubs as I don't want to put on the table what's not for dinner. There's nothing for me at the bar but danger to my sobriety. Sketchy drunks I could become entangled with. Even the gay bars I once loved for their queer community. That world I must say goodbye to.

"I will survive," I listened to Gloria Gaynor sing before leaving San Francisco. My addiction and alcoholism destroyed me for a time. I got sober. I did survive. I will survive in Hollywood as a mentally ill writer and artist. Killing cockroaches with my bare hands alone seems to be what survival in Hollywood takes. I will do what I have to do.

Every cohabitation, even my wife, became abusive. Especially the men I used to meet in bars. Abusive whether physically, emotionally, financially or all three. It is not longer safe for me to date. My boundary issues which so serve my confessional writing and Twitter land me in dangerous situations. I

know better than to open that door again. No more meeting people in institutions or bars and letting them move in with me.

I work with boundaries in my writing and art. As a textual, painterly and Internet fame-gathering strategy. Trading my reputation for notoriety and publication credits. Turning queer transgressive neurodiversity into a brand like fetch. I don't give a fuck if googling me reveals my life story. Blowjob paintings. Obscene novels. I'm not ashamed. My identity and struggle is my material. But I can't let my boundary issues endanger my safety. Perhaps they already do. Fans: I love. Stalkers: no, thanks.

I sip dregs of cold black coffee. Remember the lavish meals my high-living ex treated me to for those three years. Before we fought too much. Before I cancelled the plane tickets I bought us to my readings at Provincetown Women's Week for Bedazzled Ink's *Haunting Muses* anthology. I took the loss rather than stay in the relationship for a second longer.

I had to leave my ex. I had to leave that man for good this time. I broke up with him via text message after a revelatory therapy session. Many fights where I left his house in the middle of the night because he wouldn't stop yelling at me. I went to sleep right after I sent him the breakup text. Missed his phone calls. When I woke up it was over. The dust had cleared. I was free.

My ex contacted me via Facebook chat a week later. I asked for my stuff back. A velvet-patterned dress. American flag leggings. Lingerie. Adidas jacket. Marc Jacobs perfume rollerball. Went over to his house to find him unexpectedly waiting for me by the back door. A white plastic trash bag of my stuff that I had to walk past him to get. His musclebound tattooed arms bulging out of his white T-shirt. Telling me to wait. Telling me to listen. Telling me that he loved me.

I said, "That's nice that you love me but you never finished reading any of my books. You cheat at Scrabble. We fight too much. You yell at me all the time. You have so many problems with things about me that I don't even know why you still want to date me. You say you love me but you hate yourself and me more. You've been out of work for most of the year. Are about to lose your house. I don't want you moving in with me. Yelling at me and my landlord for not fixing the electrical problems and roaches. Possibly getting me evicted. I'd rather chill and coexist with the roaches than fight them. I'm on Disability. I can't get evicted or move. I can't end up in a battered woman's shelter leaving you in my apartment and me homeless. I'm so scared of your anger. So here I must leave you. Forever this time. Good-bye."

I drove away from his Mount Washington home. Sipped my Caramel Frappuccino morosely. Thought about all the delicious meals we shared that I would never eat again. I said goodbye to the life I once enjoyed.

Blood red steak with baked potatoes at Colombo's. Hoisin sauce and cilantro in beef roll with cold tofu and edamame salad at 101 Noodle House. Dulce de leche, mango and eurotart frozen yogurt topped with mochi and chocolate rocks at Yogurt Haven. Kale couscous salad at Tropicalia Brazilian Grill. Spicy

pork belly Tonkatsu ramen at Tatsu Ramen. Buffalo meatloaf at the Zion Lodge Hotel. Super Burrito Mojado robed in cheese, guacamole and sour cream at El Arco Iris. Walnut Shrimp and Seafood Won Ton Soup at Full House Seafood. Carne Asada tacos from the drive-through.

He usually paid for these meals. It made him feel like a man. Call me a dinner whore if you like but I accepted it. An older man from a big Mexican Catholic family, he had rigid gender role expectations. I didn't want to emasculate him. When he began to use his credit card I got nervous. When I had to pay for the last few dinners he still wanted to have I knew I had to leave.

The gold digging if that's what it was was mutual. As Hollywood as the kale we ate together. He traded dinners, gifts, and vacations for the hoped-for promise that marrying me would fund his approaching retirement with my family's money. I wasn't down for that. I never am.

The food my ex cooked for me was delicious though. I remember it bittersweetly. Rare BBQ steaks with balsamic glaze. Steamed broccoli and cauliflower. Super quesadillas with cotija cheese and avocado.

We drank pot after pot of black coffee as he beat me every time at iPhone Scrabble. He cheated at Scrabble. I know that now. He couldn't finish even one of my books because I had too much sex with other people in them. Cheating was how the ex-junkie with the BFA who didn't read beat the writer with the MFA. He fessed up to using the Dictionary and other apps when I called him out.

I wouldn't give him the usual courtesy of breaking up with him in person because I honestly feared for my safety. I didn't want him buying me delicious food to try to sway me. The way people do. The way he always did. The way he had before.

I didn't break up with him because he cheated at Scrabble. That was only part of a long series of disappointments and fights interspersed with good if blowjob heavy sex. Not the first man to take advantage of my willingness to give him all the blowjobs he ever wanted. Men can't handle that gracefully. They get greedy like spoiled children in a candy store.

Three years of trading sex for food. It grew as tired as trading sex for drugs and alcohol had been in San Francisco. I had to stop. Isn't dating always some form of transactional prostitution deep down? Steaks for blowjobs? Is that just how it works? Is there another way? Whether or not there is, I'm kind of done at this point.

Can I just not? Please, universe? Can I just not do this dating-sex-love-marriage thing anymore? I suppose I'm an adult. I can make my own decisions.

Steak with my ex came with a side of incessant criticism of my stained and imperfect teeth. Claw-like acrylic nails. White streaked hair. Plump then emaciated body. Lack of job due to mental illness. Pornographic writing and painting available to anyone with wi-fi. Past lesbian marriage. He was

embarrassed by me. Kept me hidden in his shame. Would never be publicly "in a relationship" with me on Facebook. Criticized my body while enjoying its fruits.

My fancy television boyfriend was impossible to please. Finally, I stopped trying.

I let him believe I was his for a time. For a time, I was. I don't regret it. Much as I don't regret my marriage. Those relationships had precious, beautiful, tender moments. Splendid pleasures. But every relationship has a lifetime.

I text my cleaning lady to see if she found my lost vibrator when she was changing my sheets. She didn't. I add double AA batteries to my grocery list for the spare vibrator I found forgotten in a drawer. Side benefit of the lesbian marriage: multiple vibrators. Should drown out the purring of the cat.

Better to have loved and lost than never loved at all. Better as I turn forty to be celibate. Single. Free. Productive. Nocturnal. Loving my stringy body and Cruella DeVille hair when my ex could not. When perhaps no one else can.

I make my choices. Lie in my cold heirloom four-poster alone. Eat modestly yet well enough. It is enough. There is such thing as enough. I know this now when I did not before. Enough tattoos. Enough restaurants. Enough sex. Enough trips to Palm Springs. Enough losing at Scrabble.

I have finally had enough as I turn forty. As I digest my gnocchi. Sip blood orange soda. How good satisfaction feels.

I left a string of broken relationships with men and women behind me down the West Coast. Until I was stopped by herpes. Abuse. Drama. Career priorities. Widowhood. Bitterness. Now like Marlene Dietrich in her later years I hole up in glamorous seclusion to write. Paint. Wait however many years I have left until my death.

If I never eat a bloody steak with a man expecting a blowjob again that is fine by me.

Cruelty and kindness. Always. I say what I saw and felt in print because I must for the closure I need. It will anger my ex if he reads this as he well may. If he stalks my website as curious exes do. So many things angered my ex. Like so many things I can't afford to care.

He asked me once, "Could you stop writing about me?"

I said, "I'm a writer. I write about my sensationalized life. It's impossible for me not to write about you. I can't not for as long as you're in my life." He was in three novels before the end. Let this essay say goodbye. That door closes forever.